

# GRIMOIRE OF THE ENTANGLED THICKET



ITHELL COLQUHOUN

‘I fled as a roe to the entangled thicket’

Gwion in *The Battle of the Trees*  
(Taliessin)

POETRY BOOTLEG EDITIONS  
OUTSIDE THE CIRCLES OF TIME

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## AUTHORS FOREWORD

Vegetation is under the sway of elemental Water and the West, so it is fitting that the Tree-Alphabets should come from the Celtic fringe. Were they brought, like the Cauldron of Abundance itself, from the submerged city of Murias? In their ancient and essentially poetic system, the name of each letter is also the name of a tree or plant, linked through the flow of its inner sap to a month of the lunar year.

The publication of *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves caused these alphabets in their relationship with a thirteen-month calendar to surface again into general consciousness. The **Boibel-Loth** (Birch-Rowan) alphabet is Cymric, the later **Beth-Luis-Nion** (Birch-Rowan-Ash) which I here follow, is originally Gaelic. I have used many attributions suggested in an illuminating essay by Mam Gwenddolen y Porthladd; I hope she will accept this note as an acknowledgement of my debt, as I do not know her present whereabouts.

One can find more than a hint of a Celtic *qabalah* in its close link between letters and numbers: Einigan, the First Man of the *Barddas*, is equivalent to Adam Qadmon, and either Tree-Alphabet can aptly be placed on the 'paths' of the Tree of Life diagram.

These poems form part of a series of some twenty-two poems – the thirteen months and the nine yearly festivals; in some the Tree-Month speaks as an oracle, in others it is invoked. Gwion tastes a drop from the Cauldron of Kerid-Wen – Shakespeare's 'damned witch' Sycorax – and being transformed, inspires to poetry the radiant-browed Taliessin or Ariel.

1972 was an important year to devotees of the Silver Crescent, for the thirteen months of the Calendar coincided exactly with their New Moons; this occurs only once in twenty-one years. It may be significant that in 1971 I made a number of drawings based on the automatic process known as decalcomania, which evoke the spirit of various trees – Beech, Rowan, Ash, Willow, Oak, Vine, and Silver Fir. Some of these, and the poetic sequence, I offer to the White Goddess at a time when wasteful technology is threatening the plant-life (and with it all organic life) of earth and the waters.

## **IMBOLIC**

(February 2)

The celandines' array of chryolite  
Calls out with vibrant tongue St. Brigid's praise  
And oyster-catchers, where her grown lambs graze  
Along the strand, proclaim her earliest light

With covens of sharp cries. Bride-shepherdess  
Revealed in them and in the celandines  
Their zig-zag wing your territory defines  
Who wear the yellow flowers like a dress

## **NION**

(February 18 – March 18)

I Nemetona borne here by sea-power  
A carved shell in my hand for trumpet and cup  
And coral adorning my dusky hair that spreads  
Long vaporous strands across the sky, a shade  
Cast on this rifled barrow, now my home.  
The convoluted roots of a giant ash  
Have broken open its roof, but made another.

They say I stole their children – it's not true!  
I called them from the apathy of day  
Into the murmuring shadow of my grove;  
I love what shields from light, the clouds and these  
Magnificent branches of the Nempnett ash

## **DUIR**

(June 10 – July 8)

Mysterious coppice of saplings bent from the west  
And Oaks of Eden in level grassy Meath  
With those of greater girth called Gog and Magog  
Under the towering shadow of Glass Mount  
Forgive me that I forgot your timely libation!  
I was drinking from a golden bowl of light  
I was bathing in a diamond spray of sea –

Do not strike with your lightning-rod but stand  
Robust, a wand enduring in my hand

## URA

(June 24)

Burn, heather, with the longest Sun's decline  
Who gazes eastwards into the mirror-Moon  
Returning full and unabashed his stare –  
Horizon-parted, symbol of bitter love!

When bonfire crowns this first of land's-end hills  
Bloodstone and briar-rose in height of summer  
Climb skyward after Bran who hides his trident  
In water-hall below the slope of earth

The fulvous hoopoe flits with crest of flame  
Bran's corvine, toward the ninefold heap of herbs  
Lights them to flare in honour of the Moon  
While heather burns with hue of sunset cloud

## MUIN

(September 2 – 30)

I am the month of Muin, month of the vine  
Exhilaration is mine through the garland of fruit  
Draped from the right shoulder across the swell  
Of a belly like Primavera's; yet mine of early  
Fall is the realm. On the head too are grapes  
And vine-leaves wreathing my autumn-coloured hair  
My robe the bluish mist of a sky pregnant  
With the first heavy dews.

How calm I am! Yet is there perhaps hidden  
An anger that gives authority to my poise?  
I drank from the horn-cup and swam into a trance  
So deep that only attraction amethystine  
Recalls me, after a voyage through gates of horn.

I come now to bless and renew dreams that are true

## **STRAIF**

(Samhain, October 31)

Recall, dark one, the delicate flesh  
Scenting your leafless twigs with bloom  
In moonlight's month of the blackthorn wind

Retrieve that nightmare contrast, summon  
Your life-in-death – the light-in-dark  
That stripes a hollowed agate, banding  
The granite chasm where plunge your roots –  
For a rite this phantom Eve, recall!

## **RUIS**

(November 25 – December 21)

Sunrise in the month of doom sees me cutting  
A wand of elder death-scented flowers  
And berries making a wine that I shall sip  
From a black marble cup. Of six-sided basalt  
A sliver I chip from the fluted cliffs of Shiant  
An island bespelled. Powers of doom through me  
Work your will, since I must know my fate through you

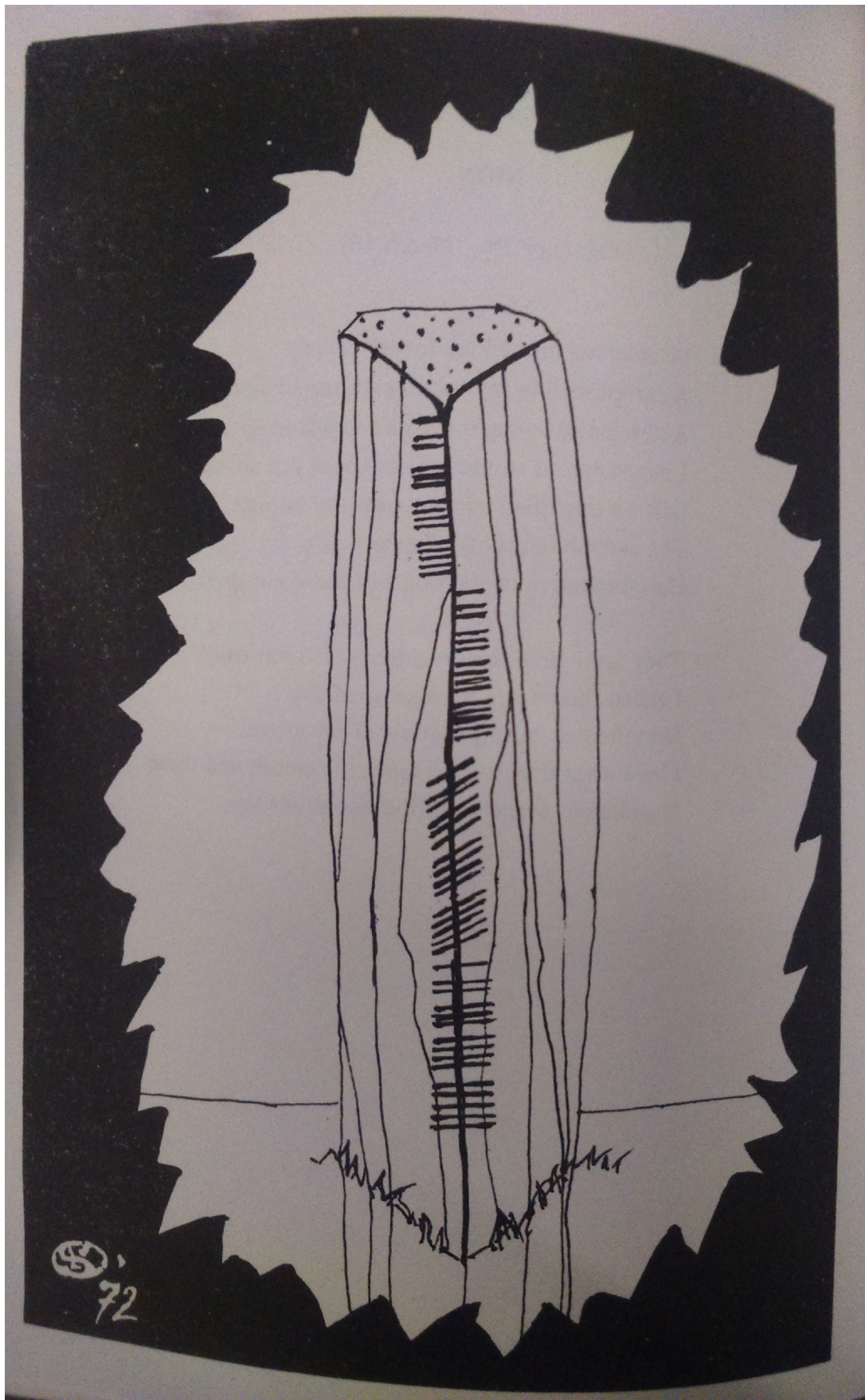
## **WINTER OF YEW**

(December 19 – 23)

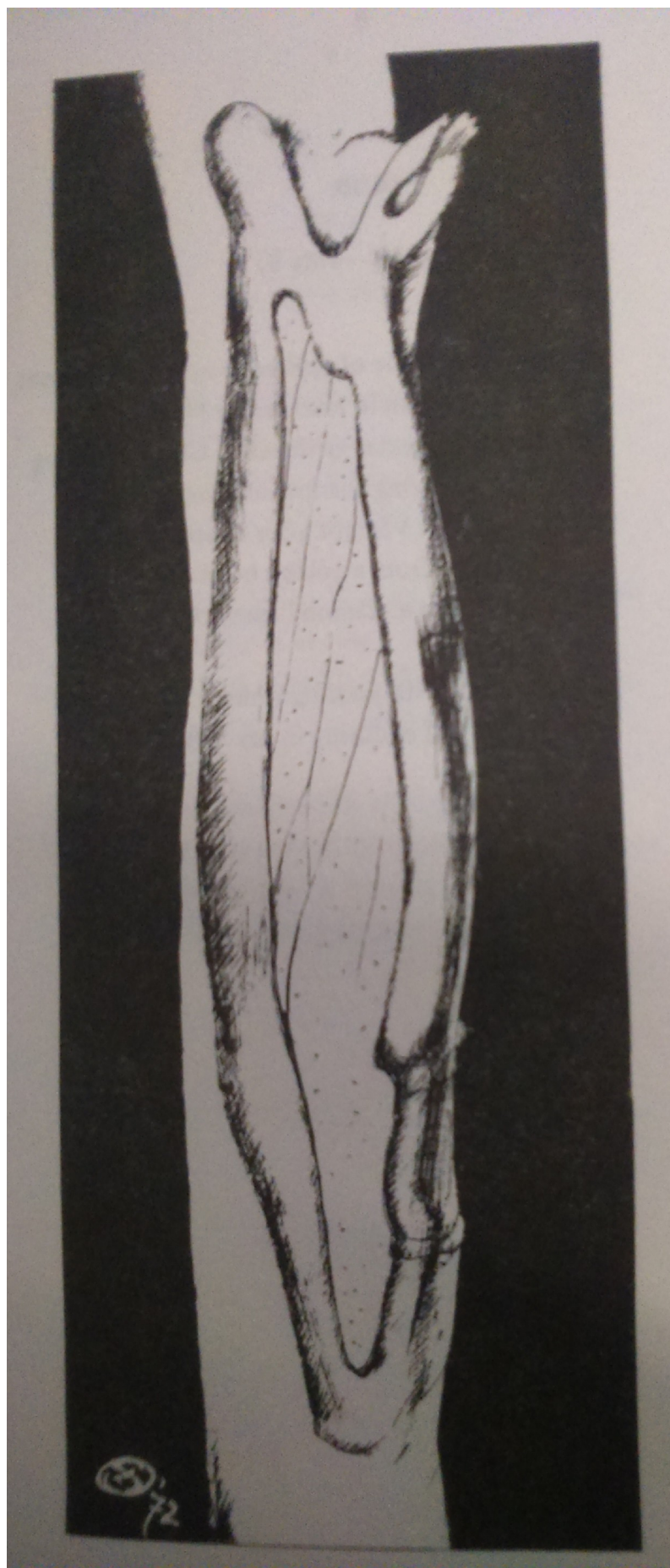
Dead is her spouse-son  
No image for him  
A shroud is her robe  
And jet her stone

A laurel-draught  
From ebony chalice  
Calls the Dark Lady  
Of winter's five days

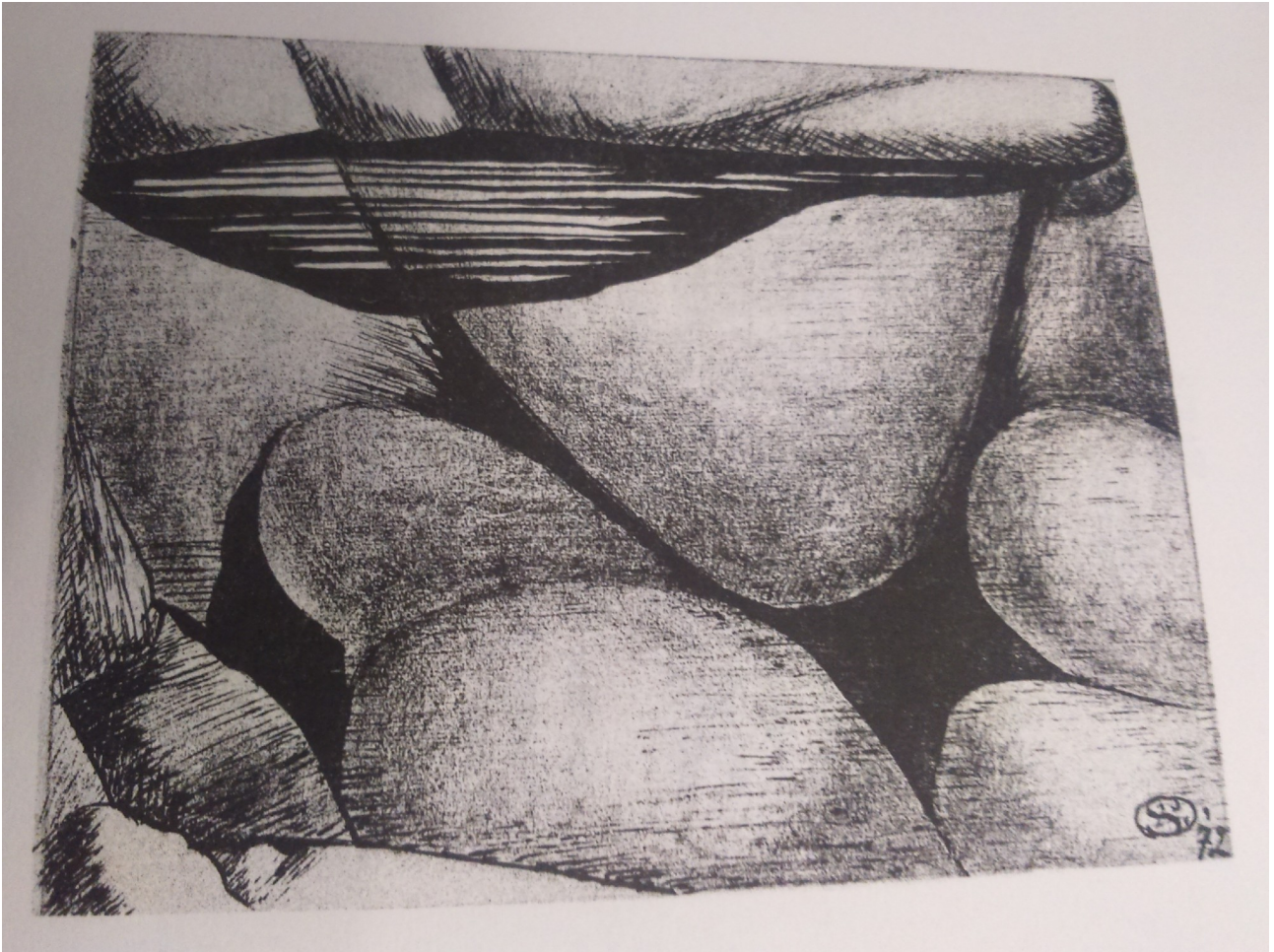
She is not seen  
The moon's reverse –  
Like mistletoe-berries  
Hail beads from the rain



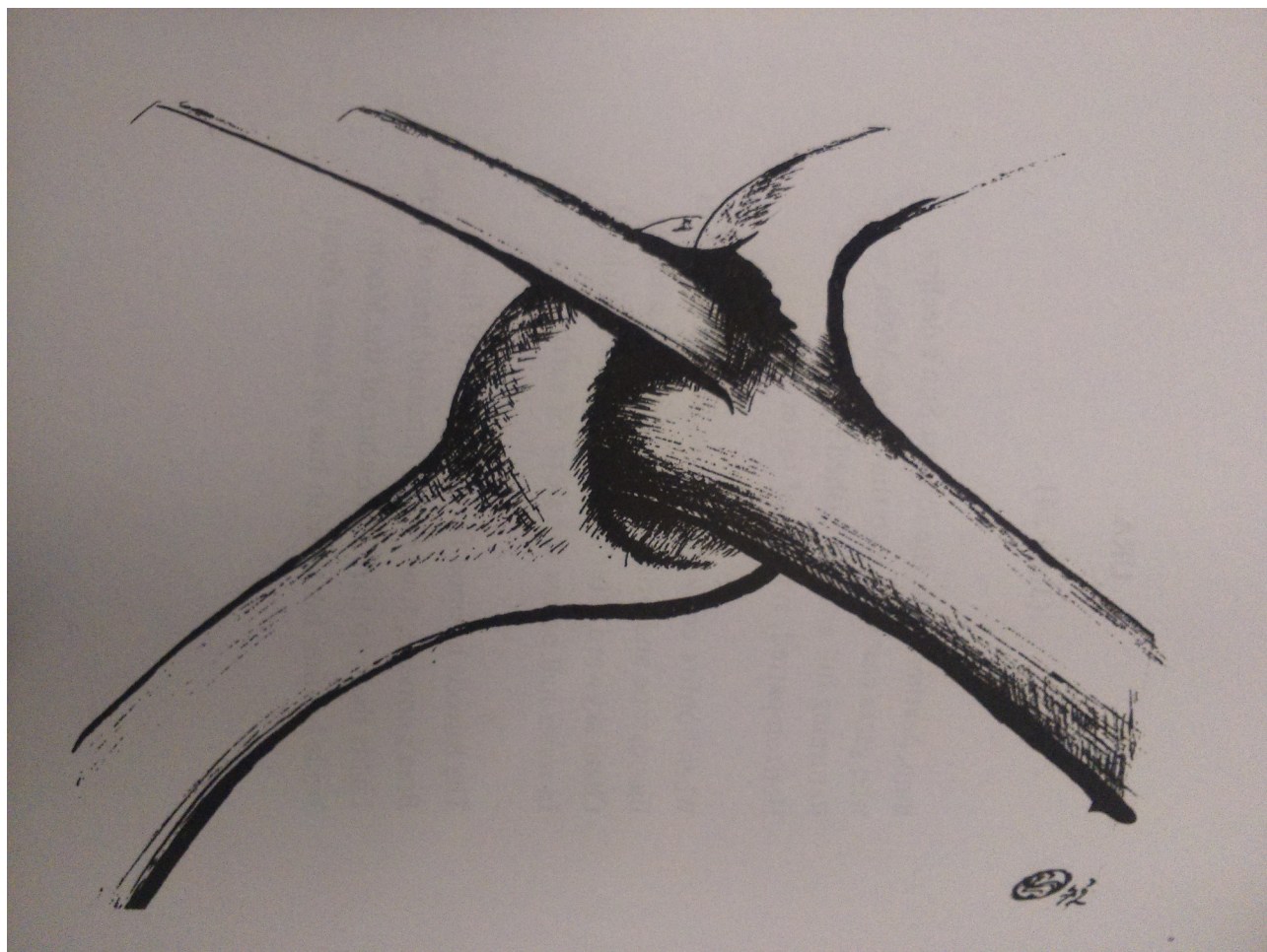
OGHAM-STONE



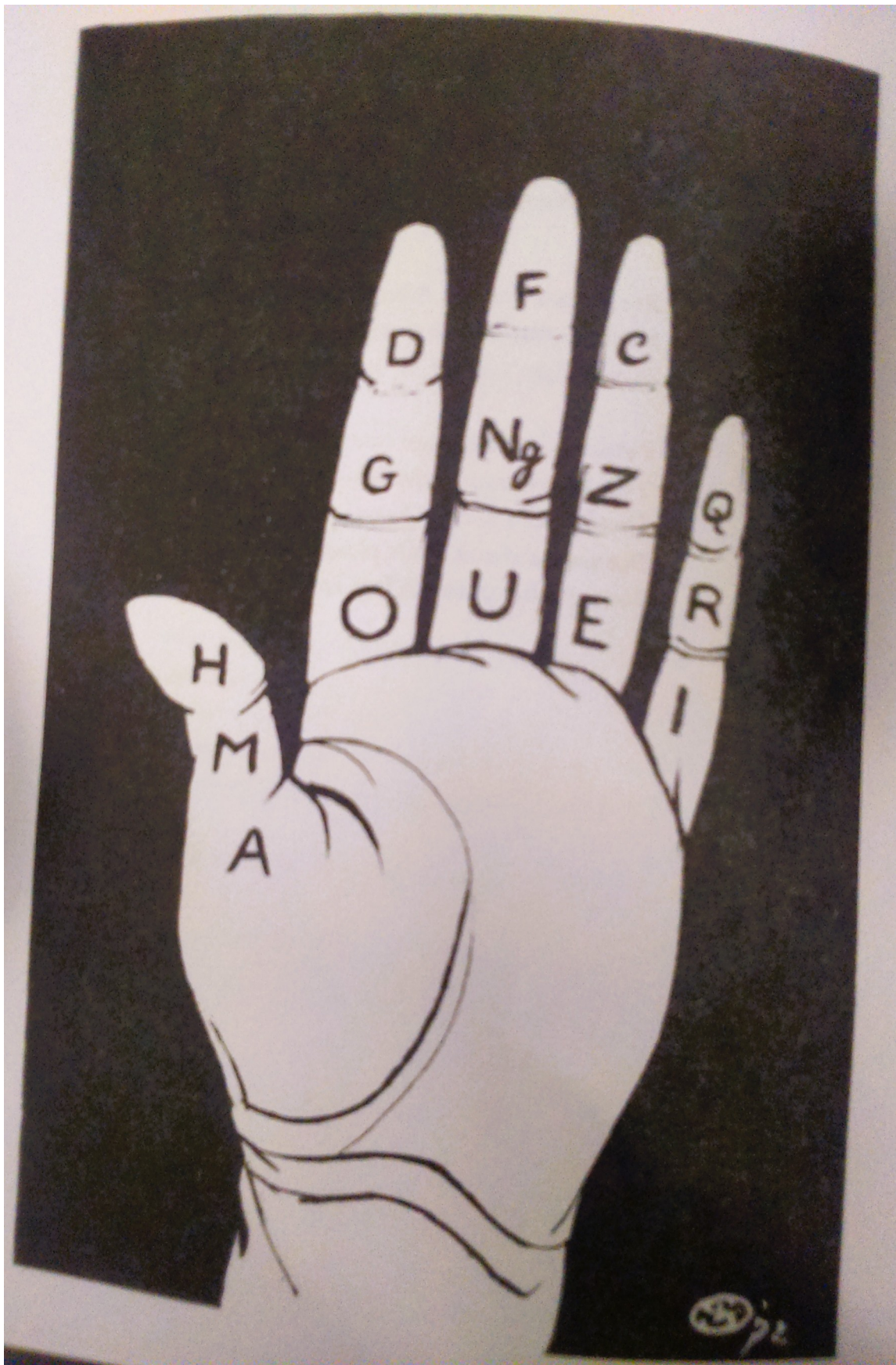
TREE-TRUNK



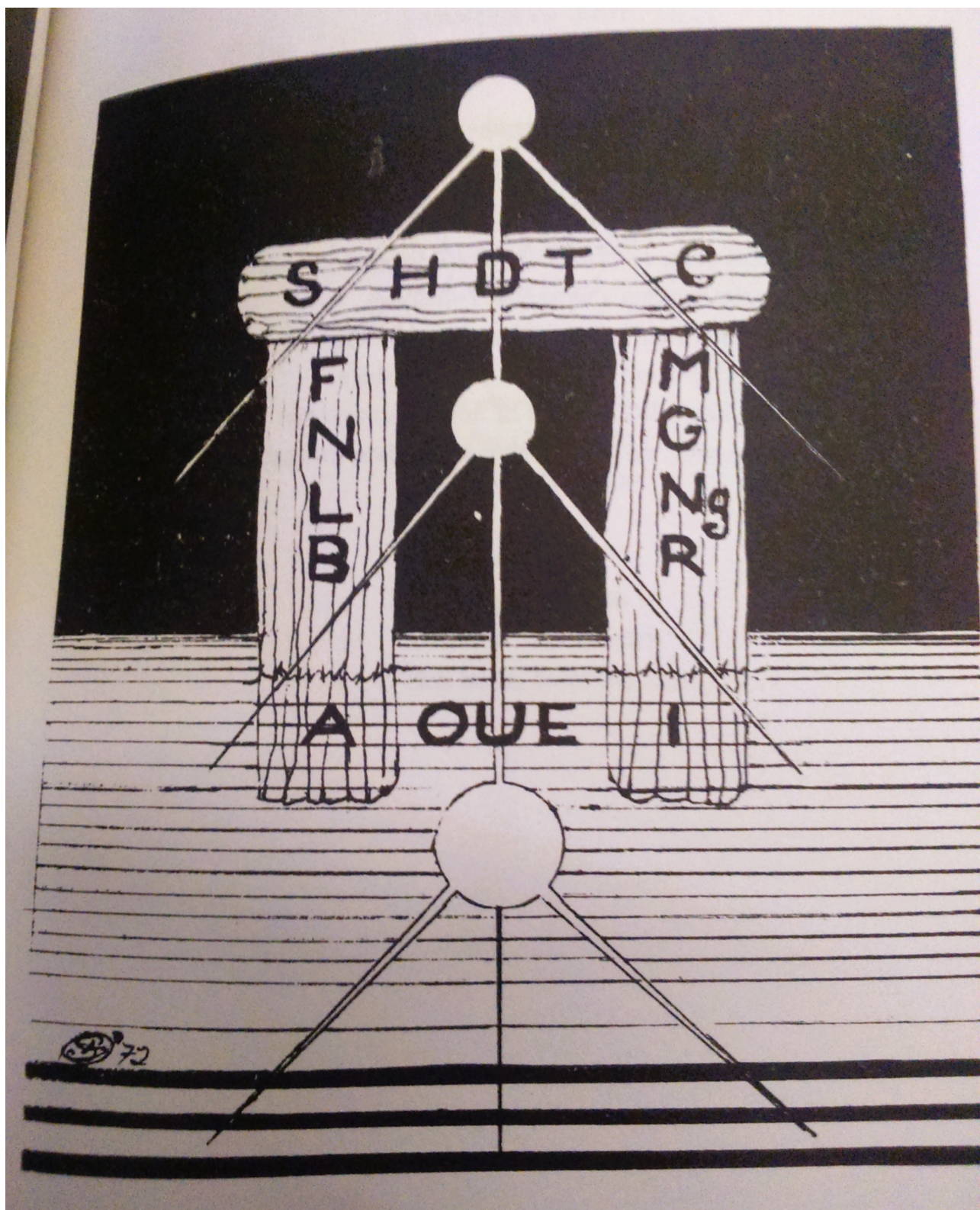
ROCK-POOL, LAMORNA



INTERLACED BOUGHS, LAMORNA



BETH-LUIS-NION ON HAND



BETH-LUIS-NION ON TRILITHON



LEAVES OF MUIN, RUIS, NION, STRAIF



SEA-ANEMONE

F',M',P',